

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, October 4, 1896, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. Sunday, October 4, 1896. Dear Mabel:

I didn't have anything to tell you last night — but when I came to take up my pen I wrote you a letter of eight pages in length (eight or four — I don't remember now.) Well tonight I really haven't anything to say and I wonder how long the letter will be!

I have made this a day of rest — been loafing — that's all. Read Glove's Explorations in Africa in the October Century.

I find them very interesting although only consisting of brief notes — not intended for publication. Only texts — from which to elaborate details for publication later on.

Read a short item in the Transcript last night that interested me exceedingly. Some foreign professor has devised a method of producing an imitation of cloud and rain on a small scale for lecture purposes — by heating alcohol in a glass beaker. Upon covering the mouth of the beaker with a cold plate or saucer — condensation begins to take place. Alcohol clouds appear in the upper part of the vessel — and a fall of alcohol rain takes place! I wanted to repeat the experiment this afternoon but a careful search of the house from top to bottom failed to reveal a drop of alcohol. “All out at camp” was Duncan's verdict. Some bay-rum however was discovered — and I tried it with this — heating it by means of your chafing-dish over an oil-stove. In this way I heated the beaker by means of a water bath — and afterwards cooled the saucer at the top with ice. Obtained very beautiful and suggestive results. This should render practicable an old idea for studying certain meteorological facts experimentally.

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A large tub-shaped vessel of glass containing inside — on the bottom, imitation land and sea. Let the ocean be of alcohol (or as Mr. McCurdy suggests alcohol dissolved in water.) Cover with a cooled glass cover. The centre represents one of the poles — and underneath it have a freezing mixture to keep it cold. In the ocean — on the bottom — have a ring of iron wire — which can be heated by the passage of an electric current. In this way we can heat the equator of our miniature world and cool the pole. Alcohol clouds should arise — and an aerial circulation be established. By rotating the apparatus we can study the effects of the rotation of the earth.

By local cooling and heating here and there — we can determine how local conditions affect the general circulation and etc., etc., etc. Produce cyclones at will for study and etc. The “tempest in a tea-pot” may have some real meaning and use in Science.

We can study the geological phenomena of great rivers — in a gutter ! Perhaps we may yet study cyclones and tornadoes in a rotating tub!

After supper this evening Mr. McCurdy and I worked at the correction of the stenographer's notes of my addresses at the A.A.P.T.S.D.

3

We completed the first address by midnight. Hope to take up the others seriatim until finished — (the addresses I mean not myself!)

Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. A. G. Bell, Washington, D. C. U. S. A.